



## Questions and Answers: Assessments and the Assessment Tool Executive Summary



### 1. What do we mean by assessment?

Assessments are conducted at different levels to inform policy decisions. Assessments at all levels (state, regional and national) should inform State and Private Forestry policy, planning and programming. The purposes for conducting assessments at each level should be distinct and complementary to other levels of assessments.

**National Assessment:** An assessment on a national scale using consistent data sets tiered to the three national priorities (Conserving and managing working forest landscapes; Protecting forests from threats; and Enhancing public benefits from private forests) and objectives. The assessment will be led by S&PF and State Forester leadership and supported by the Data Strategy Team.

The purposes of the National Assessment are to: 1) inform national policy, planning and programming; 2) highlight the conditions and trends of the nation's trees and forests; 3) help identify opportunities for multi-state and multi-agency investment and cooperation; and 4) communicate the importance of trees and forests. The National Assessment is *a process* to gather, analyze, and synthesize data to provide information to meet these purposes.

Information generated by the National Assessment will be driven by a set of questions tied to the State and Private Forestry Redesign priorities and objectives. That information will be displayed in a variety of formats -- including maps, graphs and charts, and narrative description. Information from the National Assessment will be available to inform or support development of other products such as: revision of State Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies; the annual "Report Card;" and policy development.

**State Forest Resource Assessments:** State Forest Resource Assessments and resource strategies are integral to the State and Private Forestry (S&PF) Redesign and required as an amendment to the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act (CFAA), as enacted in the 2008 Farm Bill.

To ensure that federal and state resources are being focused on important landscape areas with the greatest opportunity to address shared management priorities and achieve measurable outcomes, each state and territory will work collaboratively with key partners and stakeholders to develop a statewide forest resource assessment. The state forest resource assessment should provide a comprehensive analysis of the forest-related conditions, trends, threats, and opportunities within the state.

At a minimum, state forest resource assessments will:

- Provide an analysis conditions and trends of forest resources in that State.
- Identify threats to forest lands and resources in that State consistent with the national priorities.
- Identify any areas or regional of that state that are a priority.
- Identify any multi-State areas that are a regional priority.

- Incorporate any forest management plan of the State including wildlife action plans and community wildfire protection plans

States have flexibility in the approach they use to develop their State Forest Resource Assessments. Some states are utilizing the sustainability Criteria and Indicators as a basis for their assessments. Other states are conducting stakeholder meetings to identify important issues and resource concerns. All states will be identifying priority issues and areas, using the best available data, to focus program delivery and engage with partners and stakeholders.

Regional assessments are not a formal requirement of S&PF Redesign, but can serve to focus several states and partners around shared resource concerns and large priority landscape areas. Examples include the Southern Forest Lands Assessment and other efforts.

## **2. What is the Assessment Tool?**

A web based GIS application that provides access to a standard framework that enables the weighting and combining of geospatial layers representing the national priorities and objectives outlined in the 2008 Farm Bill. The tool provides a flexible platform to create assessments at many scales – state, regional, or national.

## **3. What scale (state, regional, or national) is the Assessment Tool useful for? Can it help support State Forest Resource Assessments?**

The Assessment Tool was originally designed to support National Assessments, but can be used to support regional and State Forest Resource Assessments through the use of different data inputs. Several of the national data sets currently in the Assessment Tool are not recommended for regional and State Forest Resource Assessments because they are too coarse (it would be like trying to drive through downtown Los Angeles with a Rand McNally national road map). States and regions will be able to upload finer scale data into the Assessment Tool in order to use it for their own analysis.

## **4. When will the National Assessment Tool be available?**

A prototype version is being tested by several state GIS program managers and members of the Data Strategy Team (July 2009) and will be available later in the summer for broader use.